1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
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dred men, more than half of whom have not reached the age of sixteen. This leaves approximately seven hundred men who are looking for mates among the same number of women. The statistical average of wives to one middle-aged man is three and one-half. Part of the discrepancy between the total numbers of married women and men is accounted for by the fact that women are taken in marriage just before they reach the age of puberty; although sexual intercourse is not indulged in until after puberty, the women otherwise are treated as wives. A second factor in establishing the unequal ratio is that men up to the age of twenty, and frequently to twenty-five, are without wives or have only one wife; they must wait either for the action of the levirate or for some of the younger females to mature. The two factors just named as expressions of the disproportionate sexual ratio in marriage do not account, however, for a sufficient number of women to make up the difference. The killing of young men below the age of twenty-five, because of the ever-present blood feuds, makes up the balance.

The one important effect of warfare on Murngin society is the seasonal slaying of a small proportion of young men who have passed adolescence and are potential or eligible mates.

In the summary of men killed in battle the writer recorded about one hundred deaths in the last twenty years caused by war. These figures obviously do not include all of the deaths from this cause. There are none recorded for the people south of Caledon Bay and only a few for those around Wessel Island and the English Company Islands, where heavy fighting has always taken place. It would be safe, on the basis of population, to add another hundred deaths to the figure above, making a total of two hundred men killed. Since each man averages three and one-half women, these men would have appropriated seven hundred women of the available supply, or, in terms of the present situation, the tribes needed seven hundred women less than they would have, had the men lived.

Warfare, then, is one of the mechanisms on which polygyny is based. If war were abolished, the percentage of men would increase, and the pressure on the social structure created by seeking mates would probably be too strong for the present form of polygyny, with its attendant mechanisms, the levirate and sororate, to survive. Since these latter mechanisms do much toward strengthening the society and preventing chaos attendant on the transfer of a woman from one clan to another, it will be seen that warfare, while destroying one type of

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177 Aborigines could never be mistaken for liberty, civilization, and Christianity.' Early settlers appropriated everything of value, and when they came into contact with aborigines and their Stone Age beliefs and customs, they could not appreciate their complex social organization and fanatical regard for ancient hunting-grounds and sacred sites. Hence the clashes and feuds of pioneering days.

Aboriginal depopulation was not entirely due to punitive measures and to introduced diseases, for Stone Age man [165] continued to die whenever he came into contact with modern man. In 1820 the British Government granted ten thousand acres at Port Macquarie as an aboriginal reserve; a mission- [197] ary worked there for seventeen years, but by that time the people were extinct and the reserve was abandoned. A realistic missionary of that day wrote: 'Judging from present appearances, by the time the missionary shall have acquired the language so as to preach the Gospel he will have no one to preach to.'

165 177 In less than a century-and-a-half the full-blood aboriginal population of Australia declined to fifty thousand, and the majority of these exist in unwanted or poverty-stricken areas of the continent. All who have had the good fortune to see the unspoiled remnants of this, the oldest of all living races, are puzzled by this decrease in population, and vague suggestions of racial suicide through crude forms of abortion make one ask increasingly: 'Why will they not propagate?' and 'Why do they lose the will to live?' It is a racial tragedy, this diminishing of a people who traversed the hemispheres before the days of the pyramids, this crumbling of a social organization as old as gregarian man, this dissolution of a race too old to be classified with any modern race, but so human that any existing race could have evolved from them.

131 657 However, they are not all dead—yet! In isolated parts of north and north-west Australia nomads roam the bush and rugged mountains of large Reserves. Arnhem Land is the

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conclusion that in north-east Arnhem Land, the natives really did know the physiological facts, but were not interested in them; they were only interested in 'spiritual conception', which established a person's place in the social and religious structure of the tribe. But whatever be the degree of knowledge or ignorance regarding the physiological facts, there is no doubt that the accepted spiritual doctrine is one of pre-existence. The unborn spirits sojourn at the totemic well waiting to be incarnated, or reincarnated; to that centre they will return after death; and without the entry of the pre-existent spirit child into the womb, there could be no conception.

Everyday Matters

Mr Chaseling is not concerned with discussing complex social and religious problems. His aim is to help us know the Aboriginal as he is. To this end he provides much information regarding interesting everyday affairs. There is no smoke-signal code in this region, and message sticks are simply aids to memory. The Aborigines like having visitors and are anxious to keep them. Like the rest of us, they are subject to flattery, and they use a highly developed form of praise in asking for favours. The status of the women is low, but some affection is shown between spouses; moreover, women do exercise an important influence on affairs; for they live longer on the average than the man (they are not killed in 'wars'), and as a result accumulate a greater knowledge of the everyday myths and legends and of the clan's enemies and friends. There are about three females to each male, another consequence of 'warfare', and connected with this is the fact that usually a man has three wives; but there are a few cases of men with up to twelve wives.

These and many like facts are recorded in the pages which follow, pages which will do much to help readers appreciate the Aborigines of north-east Arnhem Land as human beings,

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684 stating his case to bystanders: 'I "pushed" these young
682 men to kill you because you took my wife; she was not promised to you, she was never yours and always belonged to me. That is why you die.'

Wife-stealing usually results in the woman being brutally beaten or speared, and whether she goes willingly with the seducer or is forcefully stolen makes no difference to her punishment. She shows no resentment, and indeed she regards lenient treatment as a slight to her charms.

848 Because of Yulengor marriage customs the question of illegitimate children does not occur. There are frequent illicit relations, but as every girl has a husband her children do not arouse comment. If an irregular union should be openly consummated, the children do not suffer permanently, for irregular births are absorbed into the horde and into relationships which they would have had if their mother had been correctly mated.

163 Women have about two children each, though some have as many as five or six and one I know has a dozen. Many children are born, but the population is not increasing, except on mission stations where medical attention is avail-
•[165] able and child-welfare taught. In the bush, infant mortality is high, and long periods elapse between births. Children
862 are not weaned till they are five or six years of age, and I have seen grandmothers ten years and more after the birth of their last child successfully suckling grandchildren.

844 In child-birth Nature is allowed to take her course and no assistance is given beyond occasional pressure. If the child is born normally and quickly, it probably survives, and so does the mother, but when anything abnormal occurs there
[845] is a stillborn child and the mother is often injured in a way that prevents her from having any more children. Blood accompanying the placenta is tabu and is meticulously buried. Ordinarily the mother is walking within three or four hours of a birth, and within a day she goes hunting.

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752 painfully when a limb is stung. They apply a counter-irritant in the form of a string ligature above and below the wound. Further treatment is given by lighting a fire on wet sand and applying the heated sand to the spot. A third popular theory is to catch the scorpion and squeeze its body juices over the wound.

[136] Stingrays in warm northern waters vary in size from twelve inches in diameter to several feet. I well remember the night when we were two miles off-shore in a canoe and were startled by the splash of a huge black monster surging from the sea some twenty or thirty yards away. Waves from its crash tossed the canoe, and the boys did not allow closer inspection, but madly plied their paddles, for fear of an attack. A wound from an ordinary stingray is extremely painful, and I have known the poisoned barb to be driven through the thickest part of a man's hand. A black wood-
[825] beetle, like a cockroach, forms the basis of the cure, and is squeezed into the wound; later, several of the beetles are pulped and plastered over it. In serious cases the plaster is mixed with the crushed tubers of a trailing vine from the sand-dunes. Simpler and speedier relief is obtained by applying hot moist sand.

[136] The Portuguese man-o'-war is well named, and is the worst variety of jellyfish in the Arafura Sea. It has caused
• [165] the deaths of many children. Youths normally able to bear
[152] excruciating pain fall on the beach and scream in agony after brushing against a Portuguese man-o'-war. Its long trailing feeler, invisible in sea-water, carries many small cells charged with poison darts on springs. Delicate triggers hold these in position, so that once the feeler touches an object, the triggers automatically release their paralysing darts. Small fish are paralysed and drawn up to be consumed. Feelers can be quickly rubbed off the body with sand, and probably the Yulengor treatment of applying hot sand does this and also affords some slight relief.

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search and make for the shore. Within a few yards of it he also collapsed and sank.

Two days after the heavenly brothers sank in the Milky Way, another member of their horde found their tracks on the river bank and saw the place where they had made a canoe. On the beach he found a paddle and, when the remains of a canoe floated toward him, he had no difficulty in reconstructing the tragedy. A day later his worst fears were confirmed when Wawa's body was washed ashore. The hunter returned to his horde with the doleful news, and that night everyone sang, wailed and performed the purification ceremony to drive off the ghosts of the dead men. But when they went to sleep, Wawa's and Yuku Yuku's ghosts stole into the camp and spoke to the sleeping horde, so that they imagined they were dreaming: 'We have had a lot of trouble. Our canoe sank and we were drowned.' Wawa then took up the tale and told the horde that whenever they looked into the night sky they would see the great Barduru River: 'You will see our dark heads in the river. Yuku Yuku is near a bright star in the middle of it, and my spirit dwells near the shore where I sank.'

Such tragedies are not infrequent in aboriginal life. Canoes without exception leak badly but nomads risk their lives in any sort of dug-out so long as paper-bark can be rammed into the cracks with a thumbnail. During the time I was in the north at least one canoe fatality occurred every two years, and canoes frequently foundered in the waves. The most recent of these events occurred when seven or eight men and boys left for an island a few miles off-shore; a wind rose at nightfall and no trace has since been found of the men or their canoe.

Two brothers from Yirrkala were turtle-hunting in an old, cracked and waterlogged canoe, which sank under them. They were then three miles off-shore and tried to swim to a barren sandy island two miles away, but one man was a

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cripple and soon weakened. He told his brother that he could not go any farther, and calmly preparing to go down he gave away his one and only valuable possession: 'When you get ashore, you can have my tomahawk,' he said. With the usual aboriginal courage, loyalty, and determination, the older man returned to his brother, and by keeping him afloat, and making use of tide and waves, they were washed ashore in an exhausted state on the sandy island, where they remained three days without water or shade. At the end of that time they made a smoke-fire from a wood-drill and drift-wood, and they were rescued by friends from the mainland, who came to see why the brothers were camping on the island.

We were walking along one of the open-sea beaches when an old man told me the tale of the nautilus shell. He said in effect: 'We call it a moon-shell.' I asked what it had to do with the moon, and was told that the old moon dies once a month and throws this, his skeleton, into the sea. The moon dies, and after the lapse of a few days his spirit is reincarnated and appears as a new moon. I began to understand then why a nomad on seeing a new moon joyfully shouts the news to the camp. Men, women, and children rejoice together as over the return of a long-absent friend.

A long time ago a man camped beside a lagoon in the mountains. Life had dealt kindly with him, but in spite of his pleasant surroundings and good food supply he wanted to live in the sky. At night the Evening Star tantalizingly twinkled in the rippling lagoon, till the man could stand it no longer, so he climbed into the sky. His plan had been carefully thought out: 'I will live with the stars and outshine them till I am an old man, and when I die I will put my spirit in a new body.'

'Ngalindi' goes through this cycle every lunar month, and